**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Shir Ha-Shirim**

**Rav Tzvi Sinensky**

**Shiur #12: *Shir Ha-Shirim* 4:12-5:1**

This *shiur* will focus on the closing section of chapter 4 and the opening verse of chapter 5, which form a single literary unit. The verses begin:

A garden locked Is my own, my bride, A fountain locked, A sealed-up spring. (4:12)

The language can be best appreciated in the Hebrew, which reads:

*Gan na’ul achoti challah, gal na’ul ma’ayan chatum*.

The Hebrew language in this verse demonstrates a number of the key facets of biblical poetry in generally, and in *Shir* *Ha-Shirim* in particular.

First, as happens throughout *Shir Ha-Shirim*, we encounter the phenomenon of poetic doubling, with the second clause echoing and adding a new dimension to the first. Here, the opening clause describes her as a “locked garden,” while the second half of the verse, while echoing the same basic structure and theme, calls her both a “locked fountain” and “sealed-up spring.”

Second, there is extensive alliteration in these verses (just as there is in the opening two verses of the book, “*Shir Ha-Shirim asher le-Shlomo; yishakeni mi-neshikot pihu*”). The repetition of the letters “*nun*,” “*chof*,” “*lamed*,” and “*mem*” lends a literary repetitiousness to this verse. At the same time, the language seems to be specifically chosen in order to slow the reader down. Much as we separate between identical letters in *keriat Shema*, “*gan na’ul*” will be read slowly by the average reader due to the repetition of the “*nun*.” The letter “*chof*” is generally read slowly, and its doubling in the third and fourth words of the verse further reinforce this tendency. The similarity between *gan na’ul* and *gal na’ul* is sure to throw off the first-time reader and reduce reading speed, and the “*ayin*” in *ma’ayan chatum* decelerates the final phrase as well. This is likely an intentional poetic device, which is intended to reinforce the text’s meaning, in which the *dod* is suggesting that the *raya* is somehow closed off to him (with the point being that by the end of the song, she will have opened up her gates to him alone). As throughout *Shir Ha-Shirim* and biblical poetry, form and content are closely intertwined.

It is also worth noting that, just as in the verses that immediately precede this section, the recurrence of the word “*kalla*” reinforces the suggestion that this entire chapter is intended as a love song, or series of love songs, by a groom for his bride.

The following verse reads:

Your limbs [“*she-lechayayikh*”] are an orchard of pomegranates And of all luscious fruits, Of henna and of nard (4:13)

JPS translates “*she-lechayayikh*” as “Your limbs.” But most commentators, following the rabbinical usage (see *Mishna Mo’ed Katan* 1:1), translate the opening phrase as a field that depends on external irrigation for its crops’ sustenance. Despite the fact that such artificially watered fields often suffer from a shortage of water, hers is “an orchard of pomegranates And of all luscious fruits.” She is so abundant that she need not depend on external sources of beauty to make her luscious.

The next two verses continue:

Nard and saffron, Fragrant reed and cinnamon, With all aromatic woods, Myrrh and aloes— All the choice perfumes.

[You are] a garden spring, A well of fresh water, A rill of Lebanon. (4:14-15)

The second verse (4:15) returns us both to the familiar imagery of the water and to the beauty of Lebanon, highlighted in earlier *pesukim* in chapter 4. This reinforces the position that the various sub-units in chapter 4 are organically connected.

Following the *dod*’s extensive monologue, we finally come to the *kalla*’s response:

Awake, O north wind, Come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, That its perfume may spread. Let my beloved come to his garden And enjoy its luscious fruits! (4:16)

Her invitation plays on the *dod*’s directional motifs, inviting the north and south winds to blow upon her garden, making it even more inviting for the *dod* to enter and enjoy. More important, as opposed to earlier in the chapter (4:12) and even in this very verse (“*hafichi gani*, blow into *my* garden”), in which she alone owned the garden, she now describes the garden and its produce as belonging to him as well. This suggests that with the couple’s marriage, her garden is no longer forbidden to the *dod*; everything that was hers is now also his.

Just as striking, in this single verse, the *raya* manages to capture the themes referenced in the prior four verses by the *dod*: the garden (v. 12), luscious fruit (13), perfumes (14), and motif of sharing (15). In just a few short words, underscoring the theme of reciprocity, she echoes and builds on his words.

Following her response, the *dod* concludes:

I have come to my garden, My own, my bride; I have plucked my myrrh and spice, Eaten my honey and honeycomb, Drunk my wine and my milk. Eat, lovers, and drink: Drink deep of love! (5:1)

He has heard her well: he concurs that the garden is now his, and all its luxurious growth belongs to him as well. No longer is she shut away. It is the perfect poetic culmination to the loving exchange between bride and groom. He even suggests that he has already partaken; the verbs describing his behavior are written in the past tense. The couple is married, their relationship complete.

Now that the couple has arrived at this point, the *chatan* is in a position to invite others to join in the celebration. As numerous scholars note, it is the final five words – “Eat, lovers, and drink: Drink deep of love!” – which most strongly suggest that this set of speeches was initially delivered or composed to be delivered at a wedding feast. For the first time in *Shir Ha-Shirim*, onlookers are invited to participate in the love story of the couple, much as they are at a wedding meal. Of course, the fruit does not belong to them, but rather only to the *dod* and *raya*, but they may partake nonetheless. They are invited to drink – presumably wine, which is referenced throughout *Shir Ha-shirim –* and even become intoxicated. Above all, they too are called “*dodim*,” the same word that has been associated with not only the man, but with the very love itself that now inextricably ties together the couple. Just one verse prior, she had responded by inviting her “beloved [to] come to his garden And enjoy its luscious fruits!” Now, but only now, are all the *dodim* are invited to partake as well.